



U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney Eastern District of Arkansas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 13, 2007

CONTACT: Jane W. Duke
Acting United States
Attorney
501-340-2600

Leader of Methamphetamine Distribution Ring Enters Plea of Guilty to Drug Trafficking and Firearms Charges

Little Rock - Jane W. Duke, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, and William J. Bryant, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Little Rock District Office for the Drug Enforcement Administration, announced that John Pascal Soward, age 36, of Trumann, Arkansas entered guilty pleas this afternoon to drug trafficking and firearms charges before United States District Judge James M. Moody. During the change of plea proceeding, Soward acknowledged his leadership role in an organization that was responsible for transporting, manufacturing and distributing methamphetamine in northeastern Arkansas. Soward's guilty plea also secures the criminal forfeiture of 77 firearms utilized in connection with his drug trafficking activities, including one submachine gun and two silencers, as well as property he acquired with drug proceeds, including a motorcycle and real estate located in Jonesboro.

Soward and seventeen co-defendants were charged last year with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. According to the indictment, this conspiracy operated from April 1997 until June 2006 and was responsible for the manufacture and distribution of more than 500 grams of methamphetamine. Soward was also charged with being a felon in possession of multiple firearms and being in possession of an unregistered submachine gun. To date, fourteen of the named defendants have entered guilty pleas. All defendants who have pled, including Soward, will be sentenced later this year by Judge Moody. The remaining four defendants are scheduled for trial on October 15, 2007.

"This particular group of individuals plagued the northeastern part of our state for many years," Duke said. "In addition to its manufacturing activities and related crimes, Soward's organization was also responsible for the receipt of numerous pounds of methamphetamine from California and the subsequent distribution of that imported meth in this District." Duke went on to explain, "Both the local production of methamphetamine and its importation from source

locations like California and Mexico pose serious, but different, concerns. On the one hand, local meth labs are dangerous and costly to remediate. . Imported methamphetamine, on the other hand, is typically a much more potent form of meth that is actually characterized as ‘ice’. By dismantling this group, law enforcement has dealt a double blow to the illegal methamphetamine trade in our state.”

Soward’s ultimate sentence will be determined by Judge Moody after reviewing the United States Sentencing Guidelines. However, Soward faces an enhanced mandatory minimum sentence of twenty years imprisonment based on his previous state conviction for a felony drug offense.

The broad scope of this investigation is reflected in the fact that it was designated as an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) case. OCDETF is a Department of Justice program established in 1982 to conduct comprehensive, multi-level attacks on major drug trafficking and money laundering organizations. The principal mission of the OCDETF program is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle the most serious drug trafficking and money laundering organizations and those primarily responsible for the nation’s drug supply.

The numerous convictions in this case are the result of the joint investigative effort of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Arkansas State Police, the Arkansas Highway Police, the Jonesboro Police Department, the Craighead County Sheriff’s Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division and Treasury Division, the Little Rock Police Department, the Clay County Sheriff’s Office, the Trumann Police Department, the Second Judicial District Drug Task Force and the Second Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney’s Office. Senior Litigation Counsel Kevin Alexander is handling the prosecution of this case, with the assistance of Asset Forfeiture Coordinator Karen Whatley.

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See Attachment for more information.

SUMMARY OF THE OTHER GUILTY PLEAS IN THIS CASE

WILLIAM EARL WATSON

Age: 51

Trumann, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER ISHMAEL

Age: 35

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

DOUGLAS EUGENE JONES

Age: 55

Manila, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

KELLY EUGENE VEST

Age: 35

Harrisburg, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

DANNY RAY WISEMAN

Age: 37

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

PARRISH C. MORRIS

Age: 40

Lafe, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

MITCHELL RAY QUALLS

Age: 45

Lake City, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine

KEITH GUFFEY

Age: 46

Bono, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

JOSEPH BAUER JACKSON

Age: 26

Bono, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

JACK EDWARD JONES

Age: 39

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine

WILLARD LEO SPRAY

Age: 47

Trumann, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine

JOE DON SCHULTE

Age: 33

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine

DAVID FORRESTER

Age: 29

Searcy, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

SUMMARY OF CHARGES AND MAXIMUM PENALTIES:

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 846, is punishable by not less than 10 years imprisonment nor more than life imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$4 million.

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 846, is punishable by not less than 5 years imprisonment nor more than 40 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$2 million.

Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1), is punishable by not more than 20 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$1 million.

Unlawful possession of an unregistered submachine gun, in violation of Title 26, United States Code, Section 5841, 5845(a), 5861(d) and 5871, is punishable by not more than 10 years imprisonment and/or a fine up to \$ 250,000.

Felon in possession of firearms, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, 922(g)(1), is punishable by not more than 10 years imprisonment and/or a fine up to \$250,000.

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